The Girl Goddess

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Being a teacher, I had for a long time been aware of how some girls embodied some features of the goddess in her youthful aspect. Sometimes, this was expressed in a sexual way, sometimes it was not.

One girl in particular stands out in memory. She was twelve at the time, a slim thing with long often unruly sandy coloured hair whose eyes at times suggested a sexual understanding of someone much older. Sometimes she would look at me and smile, as if she knew my secret, thrusting her burgeoning breasts out. Sometimes she seemed to be saying 'I want you to kiss me'. Yet, when these fleeting moments had gone, she was just like any other girl of her age. It was almost as if in those moments the girl goddess was teasing and tempting me.

Yet it took me a while to understand that the goddess was within her in those sometimes tender, sometimes sexual moments - that she was or could be a vehicle for that beauty, charm, grace and sensuality - and I nurtured the secret desire to make those moments last, to bring them about, to capture them in her or some similar girl. Was this the yearning about which Sappho spoke:

> If you forget me, think
> Of our gifts to Aphrodite
> And all the loveliness that we shared*

But mention of this subject was difficult, even among gay friends. So it was avoided until I some years later came to teach another of those gifted by the goddess.

She was fourteen when it started, and would wait for me after lessons and after school, on any pretext. It was flattering having such a pretty girl have a crush on me but I kept a professional distance. She took to learning the violin and persuaded her parents to give her private lessons - with me, as I taught violin. I wanted to refuse, and accept. Perhaps it was ordained, but I accepted her parents offer.

Being alone and near her became difficult although for months nothing happened, except violin lessons in my house. Then one day as we sat on the sofa drinking coffee after a lesson and chatting about music and school, waiting for her father to collect her, I blurted out: 'You look quite beautiful.' It was true, she did, with her dusky complexion, dark hair and well-formed breasts. We seemed to understand one another without words - she smiled and then we were embracing and kissing, laughing and crying. And next week, a slightly more intimate touch, caress. A week after that, our lesson together forgotten, I touched her breasts for the first time before unbuttoning her blouse - afraid and exulted at the same time. A few weeks later we shed each others clothes to become lovers for the first time. And she was only fifteen.

It was pleasing, and fearful - I was afraid of exposure, of her parents, the school, discovering our secret. I felt guilty - had I betrayed my trust? Was I taking advantage of her? For months I anguished over it all. She expressed her love for me, and we were happy together. Our relationship seemed natural and beautiful. We discovered things together, played music together (her playing improved!), made ecstatic love (she seemed insatiable at times!).

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* Editorial note: Or as another, more accurate translation says -

> Go happily, remembering me
> For you know what we shared and pursued.
> If not, I look backwards to remind you
> Of the sensuous times we had.

But guilt began to poison me. We were careful at school, with her parents, but it was all a strain - for me, for she seemed to take naturally to the situation and not worry about it. I hated the lies, the deceit. I wanted to be open and honest, to tell others about our love. But it was impossible. I began to quarrel with her, find fault with her or the way she did things. For a few weeks, sheer hell. But then I understood why I felt that way - it was the guilt. So we talked about it. We loved each other and saw nothing wrong in our love or the natural sexual expression of it - it was others who would not understand, who would condemn us. 'You make me happy' she said once, 'that's all I care about'. I remembered that, and the guilt declined, although a longing for openess with others remained.

Looking back, it was as if the goddess was manifest in her at times: when making love, when walking in a certain way, when she smiled, or laughed or played the violin. Had I seduced her - or had the goddess within her seduced me? It did not seem to matter.

Today, I am happier - and still with her, although I am now at another school and she is working. The large city where we share a flat shields us from curious eyes. Some time ago we went to a few clubs, met others of our ilk. Some were surprised at our difference in age (I am just over twice hers), others are accepting. Would even those who accept us feel different if they knew of her youth, and my position, when we became lovers? Would my school force me to resign if they knew? Probably. So secrets remain and discussion does not arise, and I cannot but wonder how many others like me have gone down that same road and failed to survive, their journey of love cut short by a society that does not care or wish to understand. There still seems an awfully long way to go.

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Sappho

Fragment 41:

Beautiful girls, toward you
My thoughts will never change ...

Fragments 138/147:

Believe me, in the future
Someone will remember us ...

Because you love me
Stand with me face to face
And unveil the softness in your eyes ...

SAPPHO - POETIC FRAGMENTS: Translated by DW Myatt, with five colour illustrations by Christos Beest - available from Rigel Press, priced £14/$35 Air Mail.